



# News Release

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## **Winter fires may be cozy, but pollutants in smoke can be a health risk**

*Check air quality before heading outside*

**OLYMPIA** — With the holidays upon us, a wood fire is an enjoyable way to cozy up at home. Unfortunately, the smoke from wood fires can be a health hazard for some people. Burning wrapping paper adds to air pollution by releasing toxins and heavy metals into the air we breathe. The pretty colors of the flames may be the result of metals such as barium, cadmium, and lead.

Wood smoke and other air pollutants can be trapped near the ground when winter air patterns cause periods of stagnant air. Smoke contains fine particles and toxic gases that can be breathed deep into the lungs where they can cause immediate and long-term health problems.

People with heart and lung diseases (such as asthma), including older adults who may have unrecognized health conditions, may have symptoms sooner than healthy adults. Children can be more affected, in part because their developing lungs are more easily damaged, and they often spend more time outside.

The level of air pollution that causes health problems is different for each person. For some, a simple activity such as taking a walk may cause difficulty; others may not be affected until they do more strenuous activity like running or snow shoveling. When air quality is poor, people should limit outdoor activities and reschedule them for a time when air quality is better.

Often air pollution can't be seen or smelled, so it's hard to know how bad it might be. Be sure to check air quality before taking part in outdoor activities, especially if you're in a high-risk group.

Learn more about how air quality conditions can [affect your health](#). Real-time information on [air quality conditions](#) and [statistics on air pollution](#) for most counties is online. The [Department of Health website](#) ([www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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